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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Friday, October 29, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MIXING MUFFINS AND BISCUITS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Today, I'd like to tell you a real-life success story. The heroine is Doris, a young friend of mine who was married last June. For the past five months she's been learning to cook.

One cold, dreary day last week she called me on the telephone. We talked awhile, and in the course of our conversation she asked, "Wouldn't a piping hot biscuit with butter and jelly taste good to you this evening?" That sounded to me like one of those rhetorical questions that really don't need to be answered. But I said, "Of course."

"Well, it's an invitation," Doris went on. "I can promise you biscuits if you have dinner with us tonight."

I accepted. I wanted to see Doris and John, her husband. They're always good company and lots of fun. But I didn't take much stock in the biscuits she had promised. Doris had never cooked before she was married. She'd been busy doing other things -- playing tennis, swimming, and golfing.

But on the other hand, I also knew the meal wouldn't be a failure. Not even if the biscuits turned out to be a hoax. For Doris is one of those determined girls. She can never admit she's licked. She just keeps after everything she tries to do until she finally comes off on top. And usually she comes off with some kind of a record.

I was right. That night we sat down to a well-cooked, well-seasoned meal. Doris served it in the same calm, unhurried way that she had walked off with the women's city golf championship. And her biscuits were just as successful as the rest of the meal -- large, tender, flaky, and good.

I couldn't control my curiosity. I asked her where she had learned to make such good biscuits. And I reminded her that she had never cooked at all around home.

Doris admitted that her approach to food had always been from the eating angle. But after she started to do her own cooking she decided that more than anything else she wanted to make good biscuits.

She wanted to make other kinds of breads also, but she'd heard all the jokes about bride's biscuits and she was going to prove that they were wrong. That's not very unusual, of course. But I'd like to tell you how she went about learning to make them.

First, she decided she'd learn to make biscuits just as she had learned to swim. In swimming she started out in shallow water and practiced the easier strokes. Then as she perfected them, she got down into deeper water with more difficult strokes. So she started out first on muffins since they seemed quite simple.

Here is her description of her first muffins: "They had little knobs and peaks all over the top of them. And all through the inside were funny little tunnels. And they tasted--well they tasted worse than they looked. I threw them away before John got home and as far as I know the garbage man and I are the only living persons who ever saw them."

Doris just couldn't understand those knobs on top. She had stirred them a lot--more even than the recipe said. So she scouted around and found some literature on making muffins. The joke was on her. All the time she was stirring the muffins so energetically she was developing the gluten in the flour. And as this gluten developed it was getting more elastic and more tough. That was what had made the tunnels and the peaks.

Doris found that muffins are mixed just enough to moisten all the ingredients, but not stirred at all. Her next muffins were better. And she applied the same theory to her griddle cakes and waffles. Only she found that she could stir them enough to make the batter smooth but she didn't beat them at all.

It wasn't long until Doris could make good griddle cakes, waffles, and muffins. Then she made her first biscuits. And they were good. In fact they were so good that she got a bit cocky and decided all this biscuit talk was a little silly. They were easy if you followed directions and didn't knead them too much--just enough to develop the gluten a little bit so they'd rise.

The next time she made biscuits she didn't have any sweet milk. So she substituted sour milk and soda. She looked up the rule for substitution and did just as it said. She used the same amount of sour milk as she had sweet. And she added soda in the proportion of 1/2 teaspoon to 1 cup sour milk. Since this equalled in leavening power only 2 teaspoons of baking powder and the recipe called for four teaspoons, she added 2 more teaspoons of baking powder.

But something was wrong. The biscuits turned out rather flat. Her guests could eat them all right but the biscuits weren't as good as her first ones.

Again she took to her books to find what was wrong. The answer was simple. She had followed a recipe from a book that didn't tell her when to add the soda. So she had put it in with the sour milk instead of with the dry ingredients. She had put the soda in the sour milk and watched it fizz away. And all the time into thin air was going the gas that she needed for leavening her biscuits.

Now Doris thinks she has griddle cakes, waffles, muffins, and biscuits conquered. She just mixes her muffins enough to moisten them. She stirs her griddle cakes and waffles until the batter is smooth. And when she makes soda-and-sour milk biscuits she adds the soda with the sifted dry ingredients. They were just a few important things that her old-time recipe books didn't emphasize.

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